

**STATEWIDE VEHICLE THEFT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
November 13, 2007**

WELCOMING REMARKS

The Statewide Vehicle Theft Advisory Committee (SVTAC) meeting was held in West Sacramento, California, at the California Highway Patrol (CHP) Stillwater facility. The meeting began with opening comments from CHP Assistant Chief Debbie Vertar. Assistant Chief Vertar then introduced CHP Assistant Commissioner, Field, Arthur Anderson

Assistant Commissioner Anderson welcomed the members to the meeting on behalf of CHP Commissioner Mike Brown. Assistant Commissioner Anderson expressed the desire of Commissioner Brown to commend the members of the SVTAC for their support, and to stress the importance of the efforts of the Committee. He related that the current reduction in vehicle thefts shows the effectiveness of a cooperative effort.

Assistant Chief Vertar introduced CHP Assistant Commissioner, Staff, Kevin Green.

Assistant Commissioner Green expressed his appreciation for the SVTAC and its members. Additionally, Assistant Commissioner Green reminded the committee that vehicle theft is more than an economic crime. Often, the vehicles stolen are used in the commission of other more violent crimes, or sold to fund illegal activities. Assistant Commissioner Green suggested that rather than individual agencies or organizations which support the SVTAC making single proposals for Legislative change, the SVTAC work as a sole unit to support Legislative changes affecting vehicle theft enhancements and/or penalties. By working as a sole entity, the SVTAC could approach Legislation on a unified front, showing the Legislative committees that all members support the proposals. Assistant Commissioner Green again thanked members for attending.

OLD BUSINESS:

National Motor Vehicle Titling Information System

Assistant Chief Vertar introduced Audry Lee, Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), to discuss California's participation in the National Motor Vehicle Titling Information System (NMVTIS)

A brief history of NMVTIS was given by Ms. Lee. She related that NMVTIS was created in 1992 as a result of the Anti-Auto Theft Act. Although California was an early advocate of the program, there were no national standards for vehicle data or titling brands. It was determined that without these standardizations it was impractical for California to participate in the early days of the program.

Although there still are no national standards, DMV has, at the request of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA), met with the agencies and determined that California will participate in the program. California will, however, be participating in the program in a manner slightly different from that of other member states.

Currently, there are approximately 24 states participating in the NMVTIS program. There are two methods of participation prescribed by NMVTIS: by "batch", where information is downloaded to NMVTIS in groups of data at regularly scheduled intervals, usually daily or weekly; and by "real-time" where information is downloaded each time it is keyed by the member state.

Because California DMV's database technology is so far behind and currently under renovation, it was agreed at DMV's meeting with DOJ and AAMVA that DMV would solicit private vendors such as CarFax, Experian, and others, to work with DMV to download the information from the DMV systems and upload it to NMVTIS. Also, a web-based query system would need to be developed by the vendor, to provide access to the information by other states. The bidding was to be completed by November 13, 2007. Ms. Lee stated that once there was a successful bidder in place the target date for implementation was June 30, 2008. A two-year pilot program will then take place.

It was also stated that a projected date in 2010 is slated for the completion of DMV's new data platform. The NMVTIS pilot program will be re-evaluated at that time to discuss any changes that may need to be made, and to review the success of NMVTIS for California.

Because of the costs associated with implementing a program like NMVTIS, DMV will apply for grants that are being offered.

Action Item #1 from previous meeting **Status:** OPEN
Updates will be provided at future meetings.

Responsible: Audry Lee, DMV

Automated Vehicle Verification Process

Due to the cancellation of the biannual CHP/DMV meeting no further discussion of this topic occurred.

Action Item #2 from previous meeting **Status:** OPEN
This is scheduled for the agenda of the upcoming CHP/DMV meeting.

Responsible: Sergeant Troy Rivers, CHP
Proposed SVTAC Website

The website is in the planning stages and material was solicited from attendees to be included on the site. Lieutenant Greg Williams, CHP, Field Support Section was designated as the contact person.

Action Item #3 from previous meeting Status: OPEN
Updates will be made at future meetings.

Responsible: Lieutenant Greg Williams, CHP

Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Telecourse for Law Enforcement Use in Vehicle Theft Training

It was reported that information was posted on the learning portal of the POST webpage for access by law enforcement personnel.

Suggestions were made to ask a representative from POST for guidelines for possible training tools for the website.

Action Item #4 from previous meeting Status: OPEN
Contact will be made with representative of POST to develop criteria for training tools. Updates will be made at future meetings.

Responsible: Ron Wood, POST
Lieutenant Greg Williams, CHP

Foreign Export and Recovery

Assistant Chief Vertar introduced CHP Sergeant Dennis Frias, coordinator of the southern California Foreign Export and Recovery Team (FEAR).

Sergeant Frias related his history with the FEAR program, and gave a summary of the programs mission and accomplishments.

The exportation of stolen vehicles from California to Mexico is a growing problem for all law enforcement. The National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) estimates that 200,000 vehicles are exported illegally each year. It is also estimated by NICB, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and FEAR, that recoveries of vehicles intended to be illegally shipped to foreign jurisdictions is valued at approximately \$2 million in 2006.

These vehicles would have left the country if not intercepted by cooperating and coordinating allied agencies.

Some of the methods used by vehicle thieves include sophisticated Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) switching operations. These operations use technology to reproduce fraudulent federal labels, titling documents, and other documents used by the DMV and the CHP for vehicle verifications.

It was related that mostly late model, luxury, high-end vehicles are targeted, and are shipped via rail, air cargo, through the major sea ports, or driven across the border. Vehicles are often hidden among shipments claiming "household goods" only, or hidden among other vehicles being legally shipped. Sergeant Frias added that 100-120 stolen vehicles cross the land border crossings at San Ysidro and Calexico in a 30-day period.

Sergeant Frias related that there are approximately a dozen FEAR personnel assigned to investigate these type crimes statewide, and cover three major export points: The ports at Oakland and Long Beach, and the border crossings at San Ysidro and Calexico. Because there are minimal personnel assigned to the FEAR program, allied agencies from federal and local jurisdictions are relied upon heavily to facilitate investigations.

Sergeant Frias related that although there has been a substantial drop in vehicle theft rates in recent years, there are still approximately 12 percent remaining unrecovered. These unrecovered vehicles result in billions of dollars lost to insurance companies and the public each year.

Sergeant Frias credited the cooperative relationships, the increase in training efforts, and exchange of intelligence information between the insurance industry and federal, state, and local law enforcement for the success of the FEAR program. He additionally stressed the importance of maintaining those relationships.

Sergeant Frias suggested that the SVTAC might work on a means to increase the examination of outbound cargo, and to increase control of foreign registration through the exchange of information with DMV.

Major VIN Switching Operations

Assistant Chief Vertar introduced Investigators Yokley and Nestor, CHP Inland Division, Investigative Services Unit.

Investigator Yokley gave an overview of a major vehicle theft VIN switching case currently being investigated in southern California. In this case, more than 900 VIN

switched vehicles have been identified thus far in the investigation. The investigation has identified three methods being used to switch the identities of vehicles being stolen:

Counterfeiting: This is done by switching the VINs of stolen vehicles to VINs of vehicles that never existed. These vehicles are registered using counterfeit documents including Mexican titles and import documents. The federal labels are often counterfeit, including the bar codes, and the security feature whereby the word "VOID" appears if the label is tampered with. Registration services are often used to process the counterfeit documents.

Vehicles coming into California in this manner are often loaded with narcotics or other illegal contraband, and the suspects are often Mexican nationals who flee to Mexico to avoid prosecution.

Counterfeiting salvage vehicle documents: VINs of vehicles which have been designated as "total loss salvage" are used to replace the VINs of stolen vehicles. Often the salvage inspection documents are counterfeited as well, or the official signatures of the inspectors are forged.

Cloning: The VINs of stolen vehicles are switched to VINs of vehicles which are currently registered, usually out of state. This involves highly sophisticated methods of changing all identifying numbers on the vehicles, including the federal labels, confidential VINs, public VINs, and paperwork.

Investigator Yokley related that mostly late model, high end sport utility type vehicles, and pick-up trucks are targeted.

It was suggested that ways of combating this type of crime need to be addressed. Suggestions included encouraging vehicle manufacturers to diligently update shipping records information, and training personnel to consistently make shipping records checks.

It was also recommended that a database be created which would contain the VINs, makes, and models of vehicles referred for salvage inspections, VIN verifications and assignments, and those inspected as a result of this investigation. This database would need to be accessible to those personnel responsible for inspections, assignments, and verifications. The database would aid in the detection of a VIN being inspected multiple times.

Another suggestion to aid in the combat against this type of crime was to have closer monitoring of registration services. Not allowing two vehicles with the same VIN to be registered was also recommended.

Currently vehicle theft investigators do not have access to the records maintained by registration services without a search warrant. It is recommended that access to these records by vehicle theft investigators would be highly beneficial in investigations of this nature.

Legislative Updates

Sergeant Troy Rivers reviewed the following Assembly Bills: AB 924, which includes vehicle theft in the crime of profiteering. AB 924 was signed into law in July, 2007; AB 1401, which increases the maximum assessment of insurance companies to \$5,100. Said funds are to be used to investigate and combat insurance fraud in California; AB 1401 was Chaptered October, 2007; and AB 878, which would have given counties choosing to participate, the option of charging a \$1 or \$2 fee for each vehicle registered in the county. These fees would be used to fund vehicle theft investigations, and combat vehicle theft and vehicle theft related crimes. This Bill was vetoed by the Governor, stating that it represented a tax increase.

Lieutenant Greg Williams emphasized that part of SVTAC's mission is to review legislation which is not passed and try to come up with different approaches that may help to pass the legislation if re-introduced.

Captain Scott Howland presented a review of Senate Bill 998 which would have increased penalties for vehicle theft. He related that the cost of increasing the sentence by one year would cost the State approximately \$193 million. Captain Howland also stated that this cost to the State is viewed as having higher economic impact on the citizens of California than does the crime of vehicle theft.

Captain Howland also added that no legislation was heard last session that would have increased the jail populations. It was suggested that future proposed legislation include the means to fund it.

NEW BUSINESS

Subcommittee Meeting Review:

Law Enforcement:

Captain Mulanix reviewed the minutes of the last Law Enforcement subcommittee meeting, and a copy of the meeting minutes was provided to all SVTAC attendees.

- Action Item #1: Captain Mulanix related that one of the topics of discussion was once again vertical prosecution for vehicle theft and related crimes. Captain Mulanix solicited suggestions from SVTAC members for ways to educate the judicial system on the economic impact that vehicle theft has on California citizens.

It was pointed out as an example that in Stanislaus County a major bait car operation took place in 2006. Bail amounts and sentencing were increased, and there was not only a drastic decline in the occurrences of vehicle theft, but also other violent crimes as well. However, in San Joaquin, where a very similar bait car operation was conducted, no bail increases were made and bed space will not allow for longer sentences, the same types of crime actually increased.

Carl Adams, President, California District Attorneys' Association, added that rather than singling out the district attorneys as being the ones refusing to prosecute, more attention to the details contained in the reports of the crimes could help lead to stronger cases ending in higher incidents of conviction. It was suggested that SVTAC work as a group and meet with judicial bodies and District Attorney Associations concerning prosecution consistency.

- Action Item #2: Continue to work with DMV, and NICB to develop public awareness campaigns aimed at vehicle theft prevention. This includes identifying utility and special construction type trailers and equipment.
- Action Item #3: Continue developing case information regarding the exportation of stolen vehicles to Mexico and other foreign jurisdictions, and strategies to combat it.
- Action Item #4: Continue working with law enforcement agencies toward the recognition of non-sworn personnel for vehicle theft recovery efforts. Additionally continue working with POST toward adding information to their learning portal which would be available to law enforcement. This could include a "BLOG" type page which would include questions answered by experts as well as excerpts from the CHP Vehicle Theft Course.
- Action Item #5: The CHP is presenting to DMV a suggestion that would automate the VIN verification forms and the Salvage Vehicle Inspection Certificates. The presentation will be given at the next CHP/DMV meeting the end of the year. The automation suggestion involves electronic transmittal of the VIN verification forms and Salvage Certificates, much like the current online registration renewal forms.

Legislative:

Captain Scott Howland reviewed the minutes of the Legislative subcommittee meeting and a copy of the minutes was provided to all SVTAC attendees.

Legislation which would limit the use and retention of data obtained by license plate reader (LPR) technology was proposed but not introduced this year. Captain Howland suggested that SVTAC members need to work with their politicians to educate them in LPR use and benefits.

Captain Howland also related that the Safe Neighborhoods Act initiative, currently pending at the Attorney General's office, includes additional vehicle theft related penalties.

Public Affairs/Media Relations:

Sergeant Troy Rivers, substitute chairperson for this subcommittee, reviewed the minutes for the Public Affairs/Media Relations subcommittee, and provided a copy of those minutes to all SVTAC attendees.

- Action Item #1: Recommend that SVTAC create handouts, in cooperation with NICB and committee members, which can be utilized on a statewide basis for public awareness. These handouts could then be utilized as a template for local jurisdictions to address their respective needs, trends, and issues.

It was added that NICB has links on their website to brochures containing public awareness information regarding the problems associated with vehicle theft, vehicle cloning, motorcycle theft, heavy equipment and construction equipment theft, and other theft prevention information.

- Action Item #2: Develop a media campaign that could be produced to air at movie theaters prior to the start of movies. It is believed that this format would be productive due to the captive audience and has the ability to address a large cross-section of society.

Ralph Lumpkin, NICB, related that their organization would be able to work with SVTAC members to develop proposals such as those suggested. He also suggested introducing a "Vehicle Theft Prevention Week" or "Vehicle Theft Prevention Day".

Inviting the media to attend an introductory period at the next Los Angeles Auto Show was also discussed. Mr. Lumpkin suggested this might be an opportunity to express the concerns of law enforcement regarding vehicle theft to the public.

- Action Item #3: It was suggested that Caltrans signage and traffic information radio frequencies be utilized to promote public education concerning vehicle theft. Advertising the 1-800-TELL CHP on a regular basis via these mediums.
- Action Item #4: Make contact with the Ad Council to determine what services and/or monies are available from them for media campaigns.

- Action Item #5: Emphasize to the public and prosecutors, through media and public relations campaigns that stolen vehicles are utilized to commit other crimes.
- Action Item #6: Once the SVTAC website is developed it is recommended that an educational video be developed and be posted on the site.

Information Technology:

Captain Shaw reviewed the minutes of the Information Technology subcommittee meeting and provided a copy to all SVTAC attendees.

- Action Item #1: The development of a SVTAC webpage. CHP has a new webmaster and Assistant Chief Chadd requested materials from Enforcement Services Division (ESD) to design the page. Lieutenant Greg Williams, Field Support Section (FSS), is the appointed contact. The web page is being developed.
- Action Item #2: Updating CLETS fields to include latitude and longitude for stolen and recovered vehicles. Mike O'Donnell or Alfred Boehm of DOJ will be working with Assistant Chief Todd Chadd and Lieutenant Greg Williams, CHP, to move forward with the updating of the CLETS fields. It is anticipated that the Department of Motor Vehicles may want to participate with the updating of their fields.

The subcommittee also discussed seeking a means to simplify fingerprinting of stolen vehicles and entering the prints into Cal ID. The database contains millions of bits of information available to law enforcement.

Jerry Clemons, Western States Information Network (WSIN), suggested that the consistent entry of fingerprints from stolen vehicles into Cal ID could be used to identify repeat vehicle thieves, and help to develop crime trends and mapping. Properly training officers in the use of the fingerprint kits and the entry and querying of data in Cal ID are key elements in the success of the system.

Mr. Clemons added that WSIN encourages law enforcement to utilize the database, and invited law enforcement agencies to tour their facility located in Sacramento.

- The subcommittee discussed a means to provide updated "hot sheets" to patrol vehicles. Currently, DOJ updates their hot sheets three times per day. Representatives from CHP and DOJ will investigate further. Presently, there is no central repository for auto theft intelligence.
- Mr. Clemons offered WSIN's services to act as a central repository for all California law enforcement agencies. Lieutenant Williams and Assistant Chief Chadd will meet with Mr. Clemons in the latter part of November to tour WSIN's facility and gather more details.

OPEN DISCUSSION:

Carl Adams suggested that statistics be compiled outlining the numbers of stolen motor vehicles recovered with damages to the vehicles. He suggested that these statistics might help to convince county judicial bodies of the economic impact of vehicle theft on the citizens of California.

Sergeant Rivers related that 2006 statistics indicated approximately 89 percent of stolen vehicles were recovered in 2006, and that approximately 40 percent of those were recovered with damages.

Kathryn Door, Chief, DMV Investigations Division, related that during her recent deployment to southern California to assist with the forest fires a large number of stolen license plates were located in the Ramona area.

CLOSING:

Assistant Chief Vertar closed the meeting, emphasizing that it is imperative that SVTAC members view this committee's mission, as well as the mission of the subcommittees, as joint endeavors toward the reduction of vehicle theft, and toward educating the public, judicial members, and politicians to the impact of vehicle theft and to its prevention. She stressed that this committee is not solely for the purposes or platforms of the CHP, but for all law enforcement and organizations involved.

Assistant Chief Vertar also thanked Deputy Chief Blair Uhling, Stockton Police Department for his participation in SVTAC, and advised the attendees that Deputy Chief Uhling will no longer be participating in the committee. She added that Deputy Chief Mark Helms would be participating in his stead.

The meeting was adjourned.